

Creekside Community Church

"Call and Response," Psalm 19

January 3, 2016 Max Butler - Worship Pastor

Intro

I know I'm getting older because I'm not sleeping through the night like I used to I woke up in the middle of the night a few weeks back and I was having trouble getting back to sleep so I thought I'd listen to some music to see if that would help. I put on the Bach violin sonatas played on the mandolin by an artist named Chris Thile; and rather than lulling me to gentle sleep, my mind and heart were stirred into that deep feeling of longing I think most of us feel when we are moved by something beautiful and as near to perfect as humanly possible. And this is what I thought: Thank God for making Bach. That he would create such beautiful harmony and resolution and rightness in every way. Not only that, but he made Chris Thile and gave him the talent and passion to pursue his abilities to be able to perform such a masterful work with such grace and excellence.

Bach was a genius. He had been uniquely gifted as a musician to write music for the church that would move people by its beauty and help them praise God. And though music has qualities that have the power to communicate experiences beyond words, we still need words to help us make sense of the experience. As a worship leader I am aware of the power of music to help people connect emotionally with God but I am also aware of its insufficiency to convey who God fully is.

Another artform that has the power to express emotions beyond the scope of literal meaning, while still having literal meaning, is poetry. At the center of the Bible is one of the greatest collections of poetry of all time, The Psalms. These writings have been at the heart of worship from the very beginning of the Church. They are meant to be sung and read aloud in private and corporate settings. They use literary techniques like repetition and metaphor to help emphasize the depth of experience the psalmist is having with God. These writers are responding to their entire experience of life and God. They express all the deepest desires and longing for justice. They speak of seeing

God's power, terror, beauty, strength and grace. They cover to full range of human experience and their desired effect is to bring the hearer to the same place as the writer.

In all this reflection on creativity, art and beauty I was reminded of psalm 19. This is what C.S. Lewis called "*the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.*"¹ **This psalm shows us how God communicates to us through the world he created, the word he spoke and how we respond through worship and prayer.** God speaks things into creation and when he communicates to us we are engaged in a conversation and thus a relationship, we can respond by listening and taking part in it.

Let's read the psalm as a whole then we'll look at it in its different parts.

1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. 13 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

[Psa 19:1-14 NASB]

¹ Lewis, C. S. (1964-10-07). Reflections on the Psalms (Harvest Book) (p. 63). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Kindle Edition.

I would like to break this Psalm down into 2 parts that show God's call and our response.

1. **God Calls**

In verses 1-6 we see that God calls to us through the world he creates; and in verses 7-10 He calls to us through his Word.

2. **We Respond**

7-14 We respond to Him in worship and prayer.

God Calls To Us Through The World He Created

In his book on the psalms "The songs of Jesus" Tim Keller says this:

Why do mountains and oceans, the sun and stars move us as deeply as great art? The answer is because they are great art. Nature speaks to all (verse 2) without audible words (verse 3). It is nonverbal communication that there is a God, that the world is not an accidental collocation of molecules but the meaningful work of an artist's hands.²

The first point I would like to make is that God calls us through the world he created. Experiencing the creation of a creator draws us into a relationship with them. When you look at a painting you see what the artist includes on the canvas. That artist is telling you a story by what he chooses to put in the frame and what he chooses to leave out. He uses light, shadow, depth and perspective to focus your attention on the subject. If Nature is God's canvas we are left to ponder, what story does it communicate? When you look at an evening sunset, the painted desert, a thunderstorm, the aurora borealis, stars, galaxies or the grand canyon you might ask, "Who made this?" When we think of our own place in the unfolding drama of history we inevitably ask "Where do we come from?" Origins are important. The evangelist Ravi Zacharias says this:

"there are four fundamental questions of life..., every thinking person asks them. They boil down to this; origin, meaning, morality and destiny. "

² Keller, Timothy; Keller, Kathy (2015-11-10). The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms (p. 32). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. #

Our minds are always at work to make sense of what we observe, to put it in a context we can understand. Look at what Psalm 19 says about nature.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.

David says nature is a form of communication, a declaration, statements, brilliant displays of great power and creativity. They are evocative and stir within us awe and wonderment. The beauty in nature speaks of something much bigger than ourselves. He goes on to say that day to day pours out speech, again relating to us that we are being communicated to, that knowledge is being revealed to us. But how? What exactly is being said?

“3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world.’

This is a paradox because it is wordless speech but is well summed up in the 18th century Hymn, “The Spacious Firmament on High” by Joseph Addison.

*What though nor real voice nor sound
Amidst their radiant orbs be found?
In Reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever singing as they shine,
'The Hand that made us is divine.*

What we observe in nature points to something outside of that nature as its source, it's origin, it's creator. We can also look at ourselves and how we behave and realize that we are given desires, longings, impulses, morality and reason. Nature like art speak to these things in our psyche and cause us to seek meaning and understanding.

If we see a moral law there must be a law giver. We are able to see cause and effect. We use logic and we have a reasonable mind that is able to come to conclusions based on the evidence we are given. In theological terms this is called general revelation.

1. General revelation is knowledge that is given to everyone. If you have eyes to see and ears to hear this is knowledge, then you know right from wrong. This is the kind of knowledge that Paul is talking about in Romans 1:19

*because that which is **known** about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

The word “known” is used here it means more of a cognitive knowledge as opposed to the type of intimate knowledge that is used when we read in Genesis that Adam knew his wife.

2. general revelation is that it is of a generic sort. It gives us basic knowledge of God, like his power and divine nature. But it does not give us any details about his character and his plan for salvation. For that we turn to the Bible or what is called special revelation.

Think of understanding it in this way. Yuri Gagarin ,the cosmonaut, was the first human to journey into outer space in 1961. Because the Soviet Union at the time was a communist country, Nikita Khrushchev, took the opportunity to further the party’s atheistic ideology by proclaiming that upon reaching heaven they had seen that there is no God up there. The notion of God as some upstairs neighbor is not the right picture of how to think of Him and how we might relate to Him. A better picture would be like Shakespeare’s relationship to Hamlet. If William Shakespeare wants Hamlet to know anything specific about him he would have to write it into the play. And like that if we are really to know anything about who God is, beyond what we can observe, we have to see what He has written into the story.

Why do we need special revelation? God is the source of all truth and we can see that all behavior that conforms to that truth is good. Even Paul says in Romans:

“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.”

We live in a relativistic climate today in which people will say what’s right for you is not right for me. Different cultures have different values and who’s to say which is better or worse? But consider this. It is logically consistent to say one truth claim is true. You could also say that no claim it true. But we can’t say they are all true. We know there is a moral law, and if we follow our moral impulses we will, at some point, be drawn to it’s source. So by looking at nature and what is created we are moved by God to know

more about Him and hopefully, ultimately, intimately, *know* him. This is how God calls us through the world he created.

God Speaks To Us Through His Word

God also calls to us through his revealed Word and shows us who He is and how we relate to him. God's Word is the story that is told to us in the bible. When we read the bible we read it as one story from beginning to end. It was written over a period of 1600 years by over 40 different authors coming from different cultures, languages, and backgrounds. Yet the Bible tells one story and that is Jesus' story.

In verse 7, David jumps from talking about what nature reveals, to what God reveals by speaking to us through his law. The word law in Hebrew is Torah and one way to think of that word would be God's revealed will to us and for us. We get uncomfortable when we hear the word law and our minds go to thinking about what we have to do to be acceptable to God; but for the Jew, the covenant relationship with God was established before he gave the law. The relationship and deliverance from bondage preceded the giving of the law. So the law was to help us understand better what God is like and what we are like, and how we can live in community together. What Torah means to the Jew, the Bible means to the Christian. It is the whole of scripture most notably the New Testament which reveals Christ, who is the exact representation of God for us because he is God. In John, he is called the Word made flesh.

David lists these these 6 ways that God speaks to us: His law, testimony, precepts, commandments, fear, judgements. He also adds his own response which acknowledges the value of what God has to say. It is also interesting to note that David switches to using the name LORD, or Jehovah, the more specific name for God, as opposed to the more general term used in verse one.

Let's look at what David says.

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul.

Having this view of God's word is essential to our relationship with Him. We see that Jesus is perfect and we are not. But we also see that Jesus' sinless life was lived for us and that he took on all of our sin so that our relationship with God could be restored.

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

God's story is fixed in history. However, it is not to be treated as just an intellectual study but as a guide on how to live wisely. We often think that to be wise takes great mental capacity but the wisdom here is simple obedience by faith. We see that people who loved God acted in faith and it pleased Him.

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;

As we read the bible we see examples of how to live, most especially when we see Jesus and the pictures and types of Him throughout the Old Testament. In becoming new creations in Christ, God writes His law on our hearts and we delight to do his will.

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

No other code has such clarity and succinctness as the ten commandments. God communicated so clearly to us and it helps us to see what God wants from us.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;

Believing God is who he says he is gives us the ability to obey his commandments and to press on into a deeper relationship with him.

The judgments of the LORD - are true

True here means straight like a wooden beam. His judgements are spot on. The bible shows us that God is sovereign over everything. Nothing that happens takes place without Him knowing and He will bring every deed into the light. This gives us peace and confidence that He has a plan for dealing with the evil that we see both around us and even inside our own hearts.

So between vs.1-10 we see God calling us through general revelation with His power and beauty in nature, and then through specific revelation, His law, how he relates to us in the story of His covenant and His character, revealed in His word. Not only that but we see this relationship restores our soul, makes us wise, we have rejoicing in our hearts, it enlightens our eyes. This helps us to see him rightly, to fear him and see his judgements as righteous. After God speaks to David through nature and His law, David then responds in worship, giving praise to Him. He also enters into prayer.

David is secure in his understanding of God's mercy. He shows how he needs God's perspective to discern his ways. He needs God's mercy to be acquitted of sins he doesn't even know about. He also asks for God's power to help him not commit the sins he knows he's prone to. He ends with stating the hope that his words and meditation would be acceptable in God's sight. David does this in the power of the Holy Spirit because this takes place before the cross where Jesus atones for all our sins and gives

us access to pray like this. But that is how David responds to God's call in nature and his law.

My response

As an illustration of how this call and response worked out in my life, I'd like to share a little bit of my story. I lived with my grandparents during my formative years and my Grandfather, Oscar, was like a father to me. He was the director of the choral department at New Mexico State University and a devoted music scholar and philosopher. He would often say this about Bach "He never does what you expect him to do but as soon as he does it you know it was right." In a general sense he knew there were endless possibilities but somehow the specific decisions Bach made were right.

In retrospect I find his confidence in Bach's "rightness" interesting in light of his world view which was agnostic at best. I can distinctly remember my grandmother saying you can never really know God. Before I became a Christian, my view of God was murky at best. I did believe in some sort of God but it was more influenced by the George Lucas / Joseph Campbell theology of the Force. I came to know more about God in a small group led Greg Arthur when I was in my late 20's in Bible study that called "Knowing God". My general notion of God was changed by his specific revealed word. A verse we studied and memorized was Hebrews 1:1-4.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

That was completely different than what I grew up with, but the the idea that grabbed me the most was that you could have a personal relationship with God through Jesus. I was drawn into that relationship by merely reading His story. I looked at the life of Jesus in the gospels and considered this statement C.S. Lewis made.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You

must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

That logic made sense to me, after seeing Jesus, to say he was a lunatic or a devil was not possible and I came to faith in Him. At the end of each study the question was always asked, "If you believe this to be true, how would it change your life?"

I began to see the world differently. I became more aware of my own sin and that it was destructive and lead to death. Not physical death, but death and destruction of relationships. I saw more clearly what my dishonesty and selfishness did to people I loved. I also knew, if my relationship with Jesus as personal and intimate, there was nothing I could hide he demanded honesty. When David says "acquit me of hidden faults" those faults can be hidden by ignorance of God's holiness and character or it can be ignorance of our own sinfulness by way of habit and callousness of our own heart. Either way, when we enter in relationship with Him we accept His mercy and He will gently reveal hidden sin help keep us from the presumptuous sins. Jesus died on the cross for all the sins hidden and known; we are acquitted and, through the power of His Spirit, can say no to sin. We are blameless and acceptable because of Jesus. We are held in by His grace and He will never turn His back on us.

Along with the internal changes, I also wanted to be with other Christians and know more about Christ. God's communication drew me deeper into a community. That's when I started to come to Creekside. It was something of a culture change for me at first but I felt connected to His people, I had a desire to be in church every week, and I felt God's love through His body. I also sought out people who would speak into my life and I still today have godly men and women who take time to speak truth into my life.

I know that we all experience the same call but our responses are all different. You may not be willing to make a leap to seeing nature as being created by a personal God. And the story of the Bible may be clouded with way too many cultural obstacles to see it clearly. But I would encourage you to listen to the deepest echoes that rattle down straight to your very core and continue to follow where they lead. To as objectively as possible, in a community of people who love Christ and show it in their love for you and others, investigate who Jesus is as revealed in the Bible.

I also I think about all the ways we can respond to God I'm drawn back to the creativity that are given to us by a creator God. As image-bearers of God we are inherently creative. Actually, the term re-creative would be a better description to what is normally

called creative. As Solomon said “there is nothing new under the sun” and any new work of creativity is a recombination of things and material that already existed. I seek to find text and content from hymnists that go back all the way to the Psalms. There is a deep resonance and connection that we can experience when we sing truths that are centuries old from hymn writers like Watts and Wesley and men and women who love God and think deeply about Him.

The language that I express my love to God with is primarily music. I really love to sing songs that merge the emotional depth music has with the revealed truth of who Jesus is. I also see music as a means to relate to others that love music and may or may not love God. However, we are all created differently and respond to God with the talents and desires he has given us. We do it in the way we work. We strive for excellence because he is excellent. By knowing yourself better in light of your God-given talents and gifts you can use those gifts to be a blessing to other people.

As we learned from the book of Titus recently, our response to good news would be good works; that could be either here at Creekside or in other ministries. You might be able to teach, you might have the ability to play an instrument and sing, you might be a technical genius, you may be a great visual artist, filmmaker, chef, carpenter, knitter, listener, helpful person, good with children or just open and willing to learn. The thing I have found out about ministry is that it challenges me to press into my own shortcomings and trust God’s grace more. We are putting into practice and delighting in the law that could be summarized like this: Love God with all you heart and love your neighbor as yourself. If you feel called by God to take part in a ministry here at Creekside, we would love to hear from you and see where you can plug in.

So in conclusion, I want you to recall the many different stories and ways that God has communicated to you throughout your life and what you have seen. You are being called to through creation and all of its echoes via God creative image bearers. We are moved by truth and beauty because it touches the deepest longings in our heart. The next time you are moved to tears by experiencing that longing I would encourage you to see it as a gift from God who created you. In response seek words to help you express the depth of gratitude for that moment. There is one word that can sum up all our deepest longings and emotions; it is the Word become flesh, Jesus. It is a story that begins and ends in community: Father, Spirit, Son. We are being spoken to and invited into that fellowship. We can experience the foretaste in community here and just like David we can respond:

“ it is Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.”